

## **ONGOING HELP FOR THE MISSIONS**

### **SOME THOUGHTS FROM CARDINAL KEITH O'BRIEN**

**MONDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2009**

As is known worldwide World Mission Sunday takes place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in October each year. Shortly after Mission Sunday this year I departed for Kenya to spend the first week in November visiting various projects associated particularly with the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.

In writing in the Scottish Catholic Observer last week I spoke of the “death and resurrection” of missionaries in my All Souls Day sermon to almost fifty missionaries who had spent lifetimes of service in Africa and in Kenya in particular. I then went on to speak in similar vein of the “growth and resurrection” of our Church in Kenya with particular reference to the religious orders and congregations and their own development over the years. So many of them had witnessed a “death” of the traditional life of priests, sisters and brothers in their lifestyles – while a marvellous new vision of life as a missionary was opening up both with regard to formation as well as to the ways in which religious life and indeed Priesthood was being lived at this present time.

I witnessed “pre-seminaries” run by dioceses I visited and by the Kiltegan Fathers, and also witnessed something of the growth of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. While I was in Kenya I had the privilege of admitting three women as aspirants to the congregation as well as witnessing five previous aspirants being admitted as novices.

Perhaps one might say that the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception have grasped at every opportunity for growth. Initially founded in Glasgow some 160 years ago – their first outreach overseas was to Nigeria some sixty years ago while the most recent to Africa was to Kenya in the year 2000. In addition to this variety of apostolates the Franciscan Sisters now have a community in Rome residing in the Pontifical Scots College there. One might say that this is a very suitable “half way house” between Scotland and Africa and also a house from which suitable religious can engage in further studies in a variety of Roman universities and colleges.

Scotland has always been to the forefront in providing help for the missions – both financially and by way of personnel. Our annual Mission Sunday collection is among the highest per capita in the world; and our missionary orders and congregations are supported by the regular deanery appeals which take place throughout each year in each of the dioceses of Scotland. However further help continues in a variety of ways – with specific projects being supported often under the direction of MISSIO Scotland; as well as specific helps being targeted by “friends” of the various religious orders and congregations. A great variety have their own particular magazine selling in our parishes or being obtained directly from the publishing houses – and these all help promote the Order not just financially but by way of personnel.

In particular, while in Kenya I spent some time with the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in the Diocese of Kericho – where they have the utmost support from the local Bishop and the Kiltegan Fathers who are serving in parishes over a vast area.

Almost since the beginning of their apostolate in Kenya the Franciscan Sisters have been responsible for a project entitled “Live with Hope”, a project which helps vulnerable people of all ages and with all types of difficulties.

Financial help is given to the Franciscan Sisters – including help from the USA by way of paying their 36 employees; with many volunteers coming for longer or shorter periods of time to help with specific projects.

While I was with the Franciscan Sisters I spent two days visiting their projects following on a wonderful open air Mass of Dedication. A building described as an “income generating agency” was dedicated along with similar dedication of a field to house a sports stadium and an area to be given over to housing from street children now under the wonderful title of “Family of God”. Resources are also being set aside for projects involving intermediate care for those in need; a home for disabled children; a home described as the “Agape Home” for HIV positive children and a variety of other projects were more or less started “spontaneously” where there is a need.

Thankfully the Franciscan Sisters get a tremendous amount of help from Scotland – from individuals, from schools and from priests and lay people who spend a shorter or longer period of time working on specific projects in Kenya.

Sister Placida of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception was my mentor and guide in Kenya and she can be contacted by email at: [fsic@africaonline.co.ke](mailto:fsic@africaonline.co.ke); or through Sister Loyola the Mother General of the Franciscan Sisters who can be contacted at: [loyola.kelly@btinternet.com](mailto:loyola.kelly@btinternet.com).

It was indeed a very satisfactory visit which I spent in Kenya – and one which reassured me not only about the ongoing apostolate of our religious orders and congregations – but also the sheer dedication of so many people in Scotland to help those who are spreading the faith in other countries.